

# WORD FROM WASHINGTON



## USDA Launches Campaign To Educate Pet Owners About Bird Diseases

(NAPS)—According to the U.S. census, birds are the third most popular pet in the United States behind cats and dogs, beating out hamsters, fish, and reptiles. While most bird owners take great care to look out for the well-being of their animals, many are not aware of how susceptible their pets and backyard flocks, such as pigeons and chickens, are to illnesses such as exotic Newcastle disease (END) and avian influenza (AI).

Because of this, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has launched a campaign called Biosecurity for the Birds to inform people who raise their own poultry or who own exotic birds about the symptoms associated with these diseases.

“We must be vigilant in educating people on how to better protect their birds so that future outbreaks of serious poultry diseases such as END are eliminated,” said Dr. John Clifford, deputy administrator for USDA’s veterinary services. “This program will help greatly in our animal disease prevention, detection, and eradication efforts.”

This campaign came about as a result of the outbreak of END in California and other western states in 2002 and 2003. This highly contagious and fatal disease cost the states and federal government more than \$170 million to eradicate and it cost countless bird owners their livelihoods and, in some cases, their pets.

Biosecurity for the Birds informs bird and poultry owners about the signs of serious poultry diseases, asks them to report sick



birds and gives them information on practicing backyard biosecurity to keep their birds safe and healthy. Signs to watch out for in birds include:

- Sudden death without clinical signs
- Lack of energy and appetite
- Decreased egg production and/or soft-shelled or misshapen eggs
- Swelling of the head, eyelids, comb, wattles and hocks
- Purple discoloration of the wattles, combs and legs
- Nasal discharge, coughing, sneezing
- Lack of coordination
- Watery and green diarrhea.

For additional information or to report sick birds, bird and poultry owners can contact their veterinarian, a local extension agent, the state veterinarian or their federal area veterinarian toll-free at (1-866-536-7593) or visit ([www.aphis.usda.gov/vs](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs)).